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Because of the teacher's fear of difficult schools, her resistance to teaching in them and her lack of understanding for the lower class child, Hunter College's Project TRUE set up a program orienting education students to lower class culture. The students' reactions were studied to determine whether or not their negative attitudes changed. Four one-hour sessions over four weeks featured a panel of several teachers; each session was devoted to one topic: 1) discipline; 2) family and neighborhood backgrounds; 3) how children learn; 4) how the schools help the beginning teacher. To obtain students' attitudes, tests were given before and after the sessions. Results showed that both the experimental and the control groups were solidly middle class. However, the experimental group shifted toward a more positive attitude while the control group became more negative. A separate analysis of the experimental group showed little difference from the control group in regard to background or values. The only marked difference was that the experimental group attended more sessions than did the control group. It was concluded that such sessions were useful. Education students, exposed to positive communications from people working in lower socio-economic area schools, become tolerant and flexible.							
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Shelly T. Koenigsberg

URBAN EDUCATION

The Effect of Information on Student Beliefs
About the Slum School

Harry L. Miller

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PROJECT TRUE

TEACHERS AND RESOURCES
FOR URBAN EDUCATION

HUNTER COLLEGE
CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
695 PARK AVENUE
NEW YORK 21, N. Y.
1963

The Effect of Information on Student Beliefs About the Slum School

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The current crisis in urban education is due not only to the lower class child's alienation from the school, and to the inadequate resources with which city schools have met the challenge of motivating and teaching him, but perhaps equally to the teacher's fear of the difficult schools, her resistance to teaching in them, and her lack of understanding of the lower class child. At Hunter College, Project TRUE¹ is engaged in developing ideas and materials for changing the curriculum of the teacher training program in the hope that the department can better prepare its students for teaching in New York's special service schools, into which most of them go for their first jobs.

Education students are far from being simply negative toward teaching in special service schools. Many of them display a crusading zeal for helping the underprivileged child; most of them accept as a fact of life their eventual assignment to a difficult task, though without enthusiasm, as the data of this study indicates; only a minority show great resistance.

¹Teachers and Resources for Urban Education, operating under a grant from the President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency and Crime.

Almost all Hunter students, however, whether eager, accepting, or hostile, are unsure and somewhat fearful about the situation they will face as a new teacher in these schools. Newspaper reports, student gossip, their parents' fears, the reports of friends who are already teaching, all have contributed to a body of beliefs about the schools in lower class areas which build up their general apprehension.

Several instructors, in response to expressed wishes of students to know more about "what really goes on" have brought into the classroom young teachers who have recently been through the process of adjusting to a special service school, with excellent results. Some students were enthusiastic; most thought it was useful. The question of whether such ambassadors of reality actually changed anyone's feelings about an assignment to a special service school, or changed any of the students' beliefs about the problems they are likely to find in it, seems important enough to deserve some serious research effort. These beliefs, though they may well be anchored to some fundamental orientations toward life, are not themselves stable attitudes which one could expect to resist change strongly; it is reasonable to assume that information from a respected source might change them.

The Study

Hunter's Education Department presented four one-hour sessions on the Special Service school, spread over a period of

four weeks. They were announced as primarily intended for Educational Foundations students, but all students were invited to attend. Each session featured a panel of several teachers and at least one administrator from a junior high school in Harlem, and each was devoted to one of the following topics:²

Discipline

Family and neighborhood backgrounds

Do the children learn?

How the schools help the beginning teacher

The visitors talked frankly about the problems they encountered as teachers and administrators, but emphasized positive opportunities to help the children and the rewards of working with them.

At the time of the first announcement of the program, all instructors in the foundations courses were asked to administer a questionnaire to their classes. These consist of 15200, Introduction to Education, and 15209-210, Psychological Foundations. Aside from the usual demographic data, the instrument asked for information on the social class composition of the schools the student had attended, his reaction to an assignment to a special service school, and included the following scales: (See Appendix for copies.)

1. A series of items asking them to indicate how they would handle specific types of child misbehavior, which were selected to discriminate between middle and lower class parental responses.

²Thanks are due to Professor Vern Haubrich of Hunter for his work in organizing the panels, and to the school personnel for their generous contribution of time and their excellent presentations.

2. A general social class value scale, which measures the degree to which the respondent is oriented toward independence from family, the desire to control environment, and an emphasis on the future rather than the present.³
3. A series of statements about special service schools, some of which are to a large extent true, others stereotypes, of which they were asked to assess the truth.⁴

About a month after the last session students were given a post-test consisting of a few questions on their attendance at and reaction to the sessions, and, without change, the beliefs scale, number 3 above.

Inevitably, some of the instructors did not get around to administering the questionnaire, others gave their classes either the pre- or post-test and not the other. The final number of students for whom we have complete information (559), however, constitutes a good, though not random, sample of the total group of Foundations students. The questionnaire returns depended on the diligence of the instructors, rather than the choice of the students, which cannot reasonably be considered a biasing factor.

The Results

This analysis considers only the specific question of the

³The scale was borrowed from Bernard C. Rosen's "The Achievement Syndrome," American Sociological Review, April, 1956, Vol. 21, pp. 203-211, who based it on Florence Kluckhohn's "Dominant and Substitute Profiles of Cultural Orientations," Social Forces, 28, May, 1950, pp. 376-393.

⁴This scale was developed by the Human Relations Division of the New York Board of Education.

effect the sessions had on the beliefs of those students who attended them; a later report will explore, for the entire group, the general structure of education students' beliefs about the special service school. The analysis concentrates on a sub-sample of the total group (N 273), of which 52 students attended one or more of the sessions. Although this is not, in fact, an experimental design, we shall refer to these 52 students as the experimental group, and the 221 who did not attend as the control group to avoid the necessity of awkward descriptive terms.

The first question of interest is, of course, whether there is anything special about the students who were interested enough to come voluntarily. There are several possible explanations for differences in attendance: students in the control group may indeed have been interested in coming, as most of them report, but had meetings or other commitments that prevented them; the experimental group might be a special sample of students, differing from the others in social background or attitudes; or, they might, for some reason, have different motivations. In the absence of any psychological data, we can throw light only on the first two of these possibilities; similarities in social characteristics between the groups would offer strong support for accepting the reasons given by the students for not attending.

The experimental group is, in fact, a good representative sample of the total. The median level of their parents'

education is the same (completed high school). The types of schools the students themselves attended (public, parochial, private) were equally distributed among both experimental and control groups; there are no differences in parochial vs. public school backgrounds, nor in the social class composition of those schools. The experimental group contained a slightly higher proportion of students who intend to teach at the elementary level, and the control group a somewhat higher percentage of future high school teachers, but the difference is not large enough to rule out chance. There is a noticeable difference, but again one that might occur by chance, in the occupation of their fathers:

Father's Occupation ^a	Experimental Group		Control Group	
Professional	12	23.1	34	15.4
Business or executive	9	17.3	71	32.1
Clerical or sales	11	21.2	36	16.3
Skilled and craftsman	11	21.2	49	22.2
Unskilled	9	17.3	23	10.0
Unknown	-	-	8	3.6
	52	100.0	221	100.0

^aChi Square equals 7.6, d.f. equals 4, n.s.

Even in the absence of statistical significance, the disproportionate presence of professional and unskilled family backgrounds in the experimental group, and the strikingly high percentage of business and executive backgrounds in the control group, is suggestive.

Both groups are ideologically solidly middle class, whatever their family backgrounds. Their mean scores on the social

class values scale were exactly the same and very high (means of 40.3 and 40.7 out of a possible 48). They are remarkably similar, too, in their attitudes toward the special service school at the beginning of the term: mean scale scores are 82.45 for the experimental, 82.50 for the control. (These means are useful only for purposes of comparison, they do not indicate in this form strength of attitude toward the schools.)

Turning to the evidence for the effectiveness of the sessions, it is clear that information coming from this source, at least, has considerable power to change beliefs. This conclusion is supported by findings of two kinds: the attitude toward acceptability of a teaching assignment in a special service school, and the perception of these schools in a more positive light than before.

In the first instance, as the table below indicates, a somewhat higher proportion of the students in the control group at the beginning of the term found a teaching assignment in a special service school acceptable than did those in the experimental group, though the observed difference might easily have occurred by chance.⁵

⁵Chi square equals 2.1, d.f. equals 4, n.s.

"If your first teaching assignment were in a special service school (one with children of low socio-economic level, high proportion of families on relief, lower than average reading achievement, etc.) which one of the following statements comes closest to expressing how you would feel about it."

	Experimental Before %	After %	Control Before %	After %
Comes close to being exactly what I wish for	3.8	3.8	10.4	9.5
There are lots of drawbacks, but on the whole I would find it acceptable	57.7	73.1	59.7	64.7
It's not the worst thing that could happen, but I would not be pleased	21.2	15.4	13.6	16.3
I would accept, but plan to transfer as soon as I could	15.4	5.8	11.7	7.2
I would not accept, but try to find a teaching post outside the city	1.9	1.9	1.4	.9

The shift at the end of the term for the experimental group, however, is marked from 61.5% to 76.9% who would now find the assignment acceptable. To highlight the degree of commitment shift, if one considers only those 20 students of the experimental group who started out the semester in one of the last three of the categories above, the data indicate that three-quarters of them shifted in a positive direction, most of them into the "acceptable" category. (Using the sign test, the probability of obtaining such a result by chance is less than 5 out of a hundred.⁶) In the control group there was no

⁶z equals 2.2, significant beyond the .05 level.

more than chance shifts during the term.

The evidence of change in specific beliefs which presumably relates to the shift in acceptability of a teaching assignment is even clearer. The scale of beliefs consists of 33 items, each giving the student an opportunity to express strong or mild belief, strong or mild disbelief. One can assume that over a period of three months some random shifts in answers would occur, but that they would probably cancel themselves out. For the control group they do; if one subtracts from shifts toward more favorable beliefs about the special service schools the negative shifts, the average positive change for the group is .70. The comparable net positive gain for the experimental group is 3.54, that is, half of the group shifted toward a more favorable belief on four or more items of the scale (there is a probability of less than one in a thousand of such a difference arising by chance⁷).

On ten of the statements, almost a third of the scale, the experimental group compared to the control group shifted significantly toward a more favorable belief. Indeed, in a number of cases, the control group displayed fairly sizeable changes toward a more negative view. Here are the relevant items:⁸

- * Pupils are eager to learn
- ** Parents appreciate the efforts of teachers

⁷t equals 5.2, significant beyond the .001 level.

⁸*significant beyond the .05 level. **significant beyond the .01 level.

- * So much of the teacher's time is spent in being a policeman that there is little time to teach anything
- * Additional time spent with slow children pays off
- * The relations of teachers with the immediate community are based on mutual respect and trust
- * Beginning teachers have very little help in adjusting
- * Children show marked resistance to learning anything academic
- ** Teachers are troubled by the cultural atmosphere of the neighborhood around the school
- * Parents have so little interest in the school achievement of their children that one cannot turn to them for help
- * Most of the teachers are just waiting out their probationary period then away they go

It is interesting that though these items indicate encouraging change in negative beliefs about the learning potentials of lower class children, the teacher's relation to the community, and the probability of getting help from the school administration, they do not include any of the number of statements in the scale about disciplinary problems. On this subject, the over-riding anxiety of the teacher in training is apparently too great for reassurance.

Of special interest is the group of students whose attitudes toward assignment in the Special Service school shifted toward acceptance. Do they differ in any of the measures we have of them from their peers who attended the sessions? A separate analysis of the experimental group reveals few differences of any significance, in social class background or values, the number of credits completed in the teacher

training sequence, their general beliefs about the special service school. As a group they contribute a somewhat greater amount of positive change than their fellows do, on the belief items for which the experimental group as a whole showed significant change, but they are by no means responsible for all of the change.

The only marked difference, as the data below indicate, is that those who changed their commitment attended more sessions. It would be gratifying to attribute the shift in

Number of Sessions Attended by Members of the
Experimental Group, In Percentages, N = 52

	One	Two	Three	Four
Students who originally found assignment acceptable	86%	10%	4%	0
Students originally negative, shifted positively	47	20	27	6
Students negative before and after	100	0	0	0

attitude to greater exposure to information, but it is, of course, just as likely that a readiness or a need to change developed a motivation to return to subsequent sessions.

Conclusions

The evidence is fairly convincing on the usefulness of exposing education students to positive communications from people who are working in the difficult schools in lower socio-economic areas, and probably the more the better. An interesting question for further research is whether the ex-

posure might be just as effective if the presentations were on film or videotape; most of the classroom TV research suggests that it probably would be.

Though the design does not provide data to explain the results, one can at least speculate. The fact that the teachers and administrators who composed the panels were actively at work in a difficult school, and that at least one teacher in each case was a former Hunter student, undoubtedly gave "verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative." A number of instructors of Foundations courses were, at the same time, telling their classes much the same things, apparently without effect on students in the control group.

One must suppose, too, that education students who perceive that the special service schools provide many difficult problems, but who also know that they are very likely to be assigned to teach in one of them, are subject to a great deal of dissonance as a result. Current theory suggests that people seek to reduce such dissonance in a variety of ways. Students who find the assignment acceptable might be more comfortable if they could get information which suggests that the schools are less difficult than they thought. Those who do not find the assignment acceptable may reduce dissonance by changing both their image of the school and their feelings about teaching in it. One can account for the five originally negative students who attended one session only without

changing by supposing that they did not have to deal with the problem of internal dissonance at all, but attended out of curiosity. Indeed, they may have found that the session they did attend threatened to create dissonance by disturbing the balance they already had achieved by deciding they would not teach in a special service school.

APPENDIX: A. Child Rearing Scale

13. Below is a list of fairly common ways in which children misbehave. Suppose that, as a parent, you have repeatedly admonished your child (under 12 years of age) not to behave in this way and have pointed out why the particular behavior is undesirable, or socially unacceptable, etc.

If, after all of your attempts to teach him to behave acceptably he persists in his misbehavior (as, alas, so often happens) how would you deal with the particular behavior? Indicate your answer by CIRCLING THE APPROPRIATE NUMBER FOR EACH STATEMENT.

	<u>Ignore it let it go</u>	<u>Withhold Privileges</u>	<u>Physically Punish</u>	<u>Seek Professional Help</u>
A boy who fights with other children	1	2	3	4
A boy who uses language his mother has told him not to use	1	2	3	4
A boy who fights with his brothers and sisters	1	2	3	4
A girl who plays roughly or tomboyishly	1	2	3	4
A girl who refuses to do what her mother tells her	1	2	3	4
A boy who is willfully destructive in his play	1	2	3	4
A child who loses his temper and yells, or sulks	1	2	3	4
A child who displays aggressiveness against his parents	1	2	3	4
A boy who defiantly refuses to do what he is told to do	1	2	3	4
A boy who steals	1	2	3	4
A child who pries into other people's affairs	1	2	3	4
An older child who is negligent in his (her) dress and appearance	1	2	3	4

14. Circle the numbers of the THREE MOST IMPORTANT things that constitute being a good mother.

1. Keeps house
2. Disciplines the child
- ✓ 3. Guides with understanding
4. Takes care of the child physically
- ✓ 5. Helps develop the child socially
6. Trains the child
- ✓ 7. Loves the child

15. Circle the numbers of the FOUR MOST IMPORTANT characteristics of the good child.

1. Keeps clean and neat
- ✓ 2. Is healthy and well
3. Obeys adults
4. Is happy
- ✓ 5. Respects adults
6. Is curious about things
7. Fits into the family program
- ✓ 8. Shares and cooperates
- ✓ 9. Loves and confides in his parents

16. For a child to be happy it is most important that he be (circle the numbers of the TWO you consider most important) -

1. Ambitious
- ✓ 2. Honest
- ✓ 3. Curious
4. Popular

17. Which ONE of the following three things would concern you most when a child misbehaves: (circle the appropriate number).

1. That he has hurt somebody, or destroyed something
2. That he got himself into trouble
3. That he is not developing proper self-control, is hurting himself.

18. The most important SINGLE thing for a young man or woman to consider when he is choosing his life work is - (Circle the appropriate number).

1. How well paid and secure the work is
2. How relevant it is to his interests and personality

Appendix B: Social Class Value Scale

16

Below is a list of attitudes toward various questions of child-rearing and parent-child relationships. All of the questions presented below are matters of opinion: We want to know HOW YOU HONESTLY FEEL ABOUT THEM. Next to each statement put one of the following numbers which best describes your degree of agreement:

- 1 Strongly agree
- 2 Somewhat agree
- 3 Somewhat disagree
- 4 Strongly disagree

Even though parents often seem too strict, when a person gets older he will realize it was beneficial _____

Nowadays with world conditions the way they are, a wise person lives for today and lets tomorrow take care of itself _____

All a person should want out of life in the way of a career is a secure, not too difficult job, with enough pay to afford a nice car and eventually a home of his own _____

Parents should be greatly upset if their child ended up doing factory work _____

Planning only makes a person unhappy since plans hardly ever work out anyway _____

The best kind of job is one where you are part of an organization all working together, even if you don't get individual credit _____

When the time comes for a person to take a job, he should stay near his parents even if it means giving up a good job _____

Even when teenagers get married, their main loyalty still belongs to their mother and father _____

Parents ought to take the opinion of a teenager seriously _____

When a person is born, the success he is going to have is already in the cards, so he might just as well accept it and not fight against it _____

It's silly for a teenager to put money in a car when the money could be used to get started in a business or for education _____

If parents tell a teenager to stop seeing a friend of his own sex he has the right to see that friend anyway _____

Nothing in life is worth the sacrifice of moving away from your parents _____

APPENDIX: C. Special Service School Scale

12. Below are a series of statements about New York public schools in disadvantaged areas of the city. Some people call them "slum schools," others "special problem schools." The Board of Education designates them as schools in need of special service.

Indicate for each statement the extent to which you believe it is generally true of these schools, by circling

1. if you think it is very true
2. if you think it is true to some extent
3. if you think it is to a large extent false
4. if you think it is entirely false

Pupils have little respect for school property	1	2	3	4
Pupils are eager to learn	1	2	3	4
The personal standards of teachers conflict with those of the parents and the community	1	2	3	4
Beginning teachers have an easier time than in suburban schools	1	2	3	4
What disorder you find is largely a result of poor teaching	1	2	3	4
Pupils' individual needs are taken into account in setting the curriculum and in methods of instruction	1	2	3	4
Parents appreciate the efforts of teachers	1	2	3	4
The more experienced teachers are always glad to help the beginning teacher	1	2	3	4
Classes are too large to do an adequate job of teaching	1	2	3	4
So much of the teacher's time is spent in being a policeman that there is little time to teach anything	1	2	3	4
Most teachers do not participate in school-community activities	1	2	3	4
Education courses aren't of much help for teachers in these schools	1	2	3	4
Additional time spent with slow children pays off	1	2	3	4
The best way to handle the troublemakers is to separate them from the better-behaved children	1	2	3	4
The relations of teachers with the immediate community are based on mutual respect and trust	1	2	3	4

(12. continued)

18

Beginning teachers have very little help in adjusting	1	2	3	4
Children show marked resistance to learning anything academic	1	2	3	4
Children who persistently misbehave are expelled from these schools	1	2	3	4
Teachers are troubled by the cultural atmosphere of the neighborhood around the schools	1	2	3	4
The most important quality for a teacher to have in these schools is a thorough knowledge of his subject	1	2	3	4
Teachers who cannot adjust to such schools find it difficult to leave immediately	1	2	3	4
Some of the children are incapable of learning and shouldn't be in school in the first place	1	2	3	4
Children in these schools have little home discipline, and there is little a teacher can do to establish it in class	1	2	3	4
Parents have so little interest in the school achievement of their children that one cannot turn to them for help	1	2	3	4
Teaching in these schools can be as rewarding for the teacher as teaching in middle class schools	1	2	3	4
With many of the children, the most you can hope for is to keep them out of trouble during school hours	1	2	3	4
Teachers are afraid to walk through the neighborhoods alone after school hours	1	2	3	4
Even if a teacher succeeds in getting a pupil interested in school subjects, community pressures are such that he will soon lose interest	1	2	3	4
The principals of these schools are only interested in making things look good not in how much the children are learning	1	2	3	4
Those teachers who try to understand the problems of the children seldom have trouble with keeping order	1	2	3	4

(12. continued)

Most teachers in these schools are wasting
their time struggling with dull or badly-
motivated children

1 2 3 4

Most of the teachers are just waiting out
their probationary period then away they go

1 2 3 4

Being permissive may work with middle class
children, but you have to be strict with
children in these schools

1 2 3 4